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ABSTRACT

For children practicing basic reading skills, reading games constructed to transfer these skills to the children's own reading can be exciting, fun to play, and highly motivating. These games, whether incorporated into daily lesson plans or into learning centers, can be adapted from popular commercial games which have specific characteristics. When incorporating the game approach into a learning center, the teacher should follow steps for record keeping, reading assignments, and materials acquisition and organization. (Samples of material and lists of games for primary and intermediate reading skills are included.) (JM)

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COMMERCIAL GAMES--
MADE RELEVANT FOR READING

Submitted for Publication

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COMMERCIAL GAMES--MADE RELEVANT FOR READING

It is the purpose of this article to suggest a means to effectively integrate reading games into the curriculum and to do so both from a theoretical position and from a highly progamatic view. Sensibly constructed, such games can be infused into the daily lesson plan as supplemental practice assignments, or incorporated into learning centers to reinforce skills previously introduced.

In order to learn to read, most children must spend a rather lengthy time practicing various word recogntion skills. However, if they approach these practice exercises without much interest and are easily distracted, learning is minimized. To be effective, the practice must attract children's attention, challenge them to use their knowledge to respond, and lead them to determine the anwors most appropriate for the exercise.

Unfortunately, for many children the typical seatwork exercises employed to practice skills introduced by the teacher neither attract children's attention nor challenge them to respond. These children often answer the question passively, uncritically and with little concern for the reasonableness of their answers.

In contrast, reading games often provoke interest, even excitement, among the players and provide strong motivation to give correct answers. Skills introduced earlier through direct instruction are consciously and purposely rehearsed by students who frequently respond in an unthinking fashion to similar questions on a dittoed worksheet. Games, therefore, can be an effective means to help students learn basic skills to automaticity, a performance level seen by LaBerge and Samuels (1974) to be necessary for fluent reading to occur.

Of course, to be effective, the reading games, like all practice activities, ought to be constructed to maximize the transfer of skills to the child's own reading. As Smith (1963) suggested, such games should minimize the presentation of words in isolation (see Figure 1), should maximize the amount of time each child can respond, and should avoid being so contrived that nontransferable associations are built between the words and the context in which they are learned (the games).

The approach being proposed is a simple one: almost any game of interest to children can be turned into a reading or content area game if, before taking a turn, the pupil is required to read a word, identify a suffix, match homonym pairs, spell a word, punctuate a sentence, answer a question and so on.

In order to enhance the instructional value of such "reading" games, these six rules need to be considered:

1. Teachers should construct few, if any, game boards. Commercially prepared games (not reading games per se) are usually more attractive, more durable, and often no more expensive to acquire than teacher-made games.

When the time to make a game board is considered along with the cost of the materials, it is seldom the case that the teacher-made game costs less to make than the commercial game. Exceptions to this rule apply in instances when the teacher chooses to make a gameboard either because the game is unavailable commercially or because the teacher is attempting to convince a reluctant reader he/she is important.

2. Choose games which incorporate the element of surprise, or chance, so that when one player falls behind, he/she still has an opportunity to win. Examples: Chutes and Ladders, Sorry, Clue. When a game does not hold surprise, as one player pulls ahead the other players lose interest in the game and are less motivated to give sensible answers to the reading questions. Under such circumstances, learning is minimized.

3. Occasionally use games which include some opportunities for destruction, especially when the time to take a turn is brief (see #5). Games which permit the players to knock over some targets, throw an objects, or disrupt some organization are appealing to most age groups. Examples: Don't Break the Ice, Don't Cook Your Goose, London Bridge.

4. Regardless of the game selected, it is seldom advisable to have more than three players participating. When there are more than three players, too much instructional time is wasted in waiting for a turn. Exceptions: bingo, One-Minute Scrabble.

5. For any game you select, the time needed to take a turn ought to be minimal relative to the time needed to complete the required reading task for the reasons just stated in rule 4. Examples: Checkers, many board games, but not Monopoly, Tiddly Winks, or pitching horseshoes.

6. The gaming situation should not be used to introduce new skills. Rather, the skills being practiced in the gaming situation are those that have been previously introduced and practiced such that the pupil can select most of the correct responses when they are present.

Ten to fifteen popular games with the characteristics mentioned above are sufficient to initiate a reading skills center. In addition to these games, any number of word card games such as fish, rummy, concentration and Word-O, may be added to the skills center. The procedue for turning a commercial game into a reading game is simple. Under no circumstances should specific letters, spelling patterns, or vocabulary items be written on the gaming materials. Instead, the teacher should put all the skills to be practiced on 2 1/2" X 3 1/2" cards which can be purchased in a variety of colors from printing companies at a cost of around $5.25 per 1000 cards.

Decks of cards are constructed to include from 20 to 50 cards (fewer cards for younger or less able readers). The cards are coded on one side for identification purposes and are numbered on the other side when an answer key is included. On the numbered side of the card the reading item is neatly printed or typed. (See Figure 1.) Card decks can be developed which deal with the visual recognition of grapheme patterns, various structural analysis skills, punctuation, definitions, classfication skills, vocabulary, and spelling.

The code used to identify the skills covered and difficulty levels of the individual card decks is a simple one. For example, the card in Figure 1 is coded VH2 to stand for vocabulary (V), homonyms (H), at difficulty level two (2). It is the teacher who determines the difficulty levels appropriate for the materials she is using and her pupils. A ringbinder can be used as a catalog to store a record sheet for each skill category (vocabulary, initial consonant clusters, long vowel patterns, spelling, punctuation, classification, etc.). Each sheet is organized in outline fashion by skill-subskill-difficulty category and is continually updated as new card decks and activities other than games are added.

If a pupil is expected to simply read a word, then it is necessary that at least one other player be at a comparable reading level in order to determine if the pupil correctly decoded the word. If a pupil is to spell a word, then the opponent draws the card and reads it to the player; the card itself is the answer key. For the remaining reading skills, an answer key like the one shown in Figure 1 may be used by the opponent to determine the correctness of the player's answer.

The instances in which these checking systems fail are few, since the card decks contain items which have already been introduced and practiced with the teachers present. Every incorrect answer is immediately corrected and the card returned to the deck to be drawn again. In this way, each player is encouraged to rehearse the correct response because he will soon draw the same card again.

The reasons for utilizing this approach to reinforce basic reading skills are numerous, especially when the games are incorporated into a learning center.

First, in order to develop card decks to use with commercial games, the teacher must be knowledgeable about the scope and the sequence of the materials she is using. One outcome of this careful study is increased attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the reading program, including concern for the quality and quantity of practice exercises designed to strengthen pupils' command of basic reading skills.

Second, by constructing card decks which focus on a narrow range of skills found in the reading materials, the teacher can provide appropriate amounts of practice at the right time for individual pupils. Unlike commercially prepared reading games, which usually present too broad a sample of items for a specific skill (e.g., <u>all</u> the initial consonant clusters, all homonyms) and may not follow the scope and sequence of the reading materials being used in a classroom,

teacher-made card decks to accompany unaltered commercial games can be constructed to offer high density relevant practice when it is most productive.

Third, through the use of special card decks, children differing widely in reading level can practice together on an equal basis. They learn to assist one another in improving their reading performance and to realize that the teacher is not the only person having the correct answers.

Fourth, most children make every effort to give the correct response called for in the card and to avoid repeating earlier mistakes in order to win the game they are playing. Since it is the teacher who assigns the card decks to be used, her observation of how well the pupil performs on his own provides feedback about how effectively the pupil can utilize previous instruction and practice. In a sense, the child's performance in this type of activity is one measure of transfer of instruction into the pupil's own reading strategies.

Fifth, pupils are strongly motivated to do the assigned reading task and persist until the exercise is completed. Since the reading skills and vocabulary have already been introduced and practiced, the gaming situation seems less like a test of what the child doesn't know and more like a confirmation of what he has learned.

Sixth, the pupil is allowed to choose the game he wants and, in most instances, with whom he wishes to play. The emphasis is on the child assuming some responsibility for what he is learning and therefore for completing the chosen activity in an acceptable fashion within the time alloted. Such learning experiences tend to foster independence and some recognition of the fact that it is primarily the child, and not the teacher, who is the learner. Also, since the children select the games they wish to play, while the teacher assigns the specific card deck to use, most children are eager to stay on task and complete the assignments <u>because they choose to do it</u>!

A teacher-structured gaming program can be effectively monitored by older students, parent volunteers and, yes, even school social workers, principals and other interested adults to provide more assistance for individual pupils when they need it. This is possible because the reading skills have been previously introduced to and practiced by the pupil, because most of the card decks have answer keys held by the opponent, because most adults are in a position to recognize a correct response when they hear it, and because the teacher is responsible for assigning each pupil to a skill and level appropriate for that child.

In order to effectively and efficiently implement this approach to skills instruction within a learning center, the teacher should consider these four steps.

First, some type of record keeping system is advisable so that the teacher can assign to each pupil particular card decks dealing with specific reading skills which may or may not be appropriate for

other pupils reading at the same level. Unless some form of record keeping is used, it is unlikely that a teacher could assign each child in the class to an appropriate skill at the time when practice would be most effective--and do so week after week.

Second, a prescription card should be developed both to serve as a written assignment sheet for the pupil and as a record of which skills, or centers, each pupil was assigned and some evaluation of how the student performed.

If, over time, centers are constructed within or across classrooms such that different skills are being practiced (e.g., spelling, prefixes and suffixes, predictable patterns, sight vocabulary, creative writing, comprehension, study skills, etc.) then a prescription card/record sheet like that in Figure 2 becomes highly functional.

The prescription sheet can be filled in by the teacher on a biweekly basis. The initials below each assigned center confirm the fact that the pupil did complete the activity. By examining the comments written next to the skill center picture by the teacher, by the adult or student volunteer, or by the pupil himself, the teacher can reassign the pupil to the same level, to different levels within a particular skill center, or to other centers. The comments are diagnostic in character, but simple: too easy; too hard; send back again; worked well; fine, etc.

Third, the implementation of a gaming approach requires planning, time to develop card decks and materials commonly found in learning centers, and careful record keeping. It makes sense, then, to utilize these materials in lieu of some of the more traditional seatwork activities, and to do so frequently enough to warrant the effort expended. These materials are not meant to be used after a child's work is done, or as an occasional Friday afternoon treat. Rather, by following the procedures suggested here, games can be an effective part of the regular reading program, to be used once or twice a week for as long as an hour with children at all reading levels. When sensibly sequenced, carefully constructed, and regularly evaluated, the gaming approach will incite pupils to willingly and thoughtfully practice basic reading skills normally considered by many children, especially average and low readers, to be dull and senseless.

Finally, the materials needed to initiate a gaming approach can be acquired inexpensively through a variety of sources for under $50.00. Typically, a collection of games like those listed in Figure 3 is sufficient to initiate a center.

What has been suggested is that all too often children are required to practice basic reading skills using prescribed materials which do little to motivate them to attend, to think, to learn. The pupils rarely are given a choice of activities and often receive additional work of a similar character when they complete their assignments. Games, on the other hand, are exciting, fun to play, and hold children's attention. By associating basic skills with games--games which the children choose to play--most pupils become

highly motivated to continually practice basic skills until those skills become automatic. In fact, the more automatic whose skills become, the better the pupils like it because they seldom miss a turn, and, more significantly, they can see the development of their own reading proficiency. While no one approach has ever been demonstrated to be effective for all pupils all the time, it is hoped that you will give serious consideration to the incorporation of commercially developed games into your reading program. Used sensibly they do make a difference!

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Smith, Nila Banton. Reading instruction for today's children. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1963. pp. 173-175.

Materials

Checkers. Racine, Wisconsin: Western Publishing Co., Inc., 1975

Chutes and ladders. Springfield, Mass.: Milton Bradley, 1976.

Clue. Salem, Mass.: Parker Brothers, 1976.

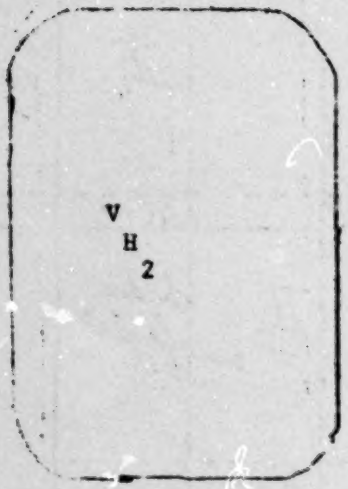
Don't break the ice. Minneapolis, Minn.: Schaper Mfg. Co., 1976.

Don't cook your goose. Minneapolis, Minn.: Schaper Mfg. Co., 1976.

London bridge. Minneapolis, Minn.: Schaper Mfg. Co., 1976

Monopoly. Salem, Mass.: Parker Brothers, 1975.

Scrabble got a minute. Bay Shore, New York: Selchow & Righter Co., 1973.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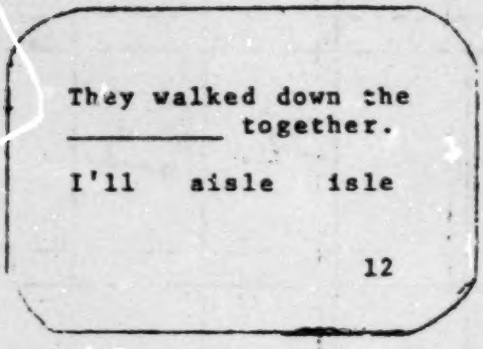
H
2


They walked down the
_____ together.
I'll aisle isle
12

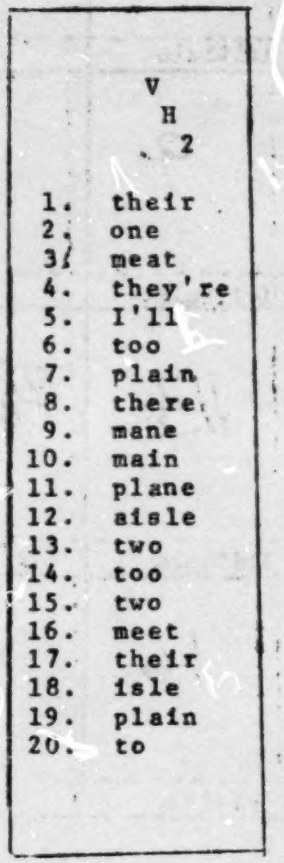
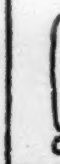
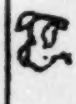

V
H
2
1. their
2. one
3. meat
4. they're
5. I'll
6. too
7. plain
8. there
9. mane
10. main
11. plane
12. aisle
13. two
14. too
15. two
16. meet
17. their
18. isle
19. plain
20. to

Figure 1

NAME Bobby J.

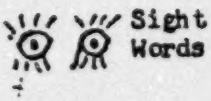
DATE April ROOM 212

Skill Centers / Week								
6			worked well		II A		fine	IV
Initials					C.C.			ZK
9			I C 2	ok - send back			II A	too hard
Initials			R.S.				ZK	
13	II B	ok				II A 2	didn't finish	
Initials	Z.C.					Z.L		
16			I C 2	fine			I C	ok - enjoyed task
Initials			R.S.				ZK	

KEY

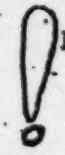
Consonant Clusters

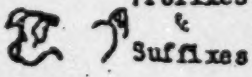
Predictable Patterns

 Sight Words

Vowel Clusters

Spelling

 Punctuation

 Prefixes & Suffixes

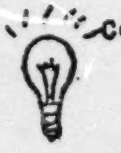
 Comprehension

Figure 2

PRIMARY

Title	Publisher	Approximate Cost
Chutes and Ladders	Milton-Bradley (MB)	$2.98
Walk Along Sesame Street	MB	3.88
Raggedy Ann	MB	2.99
Candyland	MB	3.29
Yogi Bear	MB	1.25
Casper the Friendly Ghost	MB	1.25
Land of the Lost	MB	1.90
Pizza Pie Game	MB	5.03
The Great Grape Ape	MB	1.25
Checkers (2 sets)	MB	2.00
Cootie	Schaper (S)	3.25
London Bridge	S	4.99
Humpty-Dumpty	S	3.98
Don't Break the Ice	S	4.66
Hi-Ho Cherry-O	Whitman	1.88
Scrabble Alphabet Game	Selchow & Righter	4.77
Bingo	(teacher made)	- - -
Concentration game boards	(teacher made)	.50
Assorted word card games	(teacher made)	- - -
		$49.55

INTERMEDIATE

Chutes and Ladders	Milton-Bradley (MB)	$2.98
Go to the Head of the Class	MB	4.99
Speed Buggy	MB	1.25
Scooby Doo	MB	1.23
Emergency	MB	2.99
Homestretch	MB	2.90
Planet of the Apes	mb	2.90
Korg--70,000 B.C.	MB	1.90
Checkers	MB	1.00
Guiness Book of Records Game	Parker Brothers (PB)	6.79
Scrabble Got a Minute	Selchow & Righter	2.98
Kerplunk	Ideal	5.96
Tip-It	Ideal	2.90
Don't Break the Ice	Schaper (S)	4.66
Don't Cook Your Goose	S	3.98
Bingo	(teacher made)	- - -
Concentration game boards	(teacher made)	.50
Assorted word card games	(teacher made)	- - -
		$49.91

Figure 3